Father of His Country: The Significance of Parenthood in *Aeneid* 8

In what is perhaps the *Aeneid*'s most iconic scene, Aeneas brings his father and son safely from the burning ruins of Troy. This powerful scene foreshadows the significance of parenthood, especially fatherhood, as a leitmotif for Virgil's epic. Seemingly, Aeneas' relationships with his father and son define the hero's place in the world, and indeed the centrality of fatherhood has been an important theme of Virgilian scholarship (Petrini 1997, O'Sullivan 2009). However, its significance is not static; as the epic progresses, the depiction of parental roles begins to change. This change is explored most deeply in *Aeneid* 8. Here, Virgil explores three related aspects of parenthood: biological parenthood, civic fatherhood, and marginalized motherhood. In this paper, I argue that biological parenthood is sacrificed in favor of the metaphorical fatherhood (that of the *pater patriae*) that produces and governs cities, while motherhood becomes a disruptive force. Several passages in Book 8 reveal how Virgil problematizes the various aspects of parenthood in his epic.

In Evander's farewell speech to Pallas (8.560-584), knowing the risks, he entrusts his son to the care of another father-figure for the sake of a civic good. Despite his affection for his son, Evander sacrifices him to the cause championed by Aeneas, Pallas' surrogate father and the future 'father' of the Roman people (Lee 1979). More subtly, this theme of parental sacrifice is anticipated in the offering of the white sow with her offspring (36-85), a scene that seems to presage Rome's successful founding. However, Dyson (2001) argues that this sacrifice is faulty, requiring some further, more costly sacrifice (the sacrifice of a son?) to rectify it. Just as the death of the sow foreshadows the loss of Evander's biological son to a father of the state, so too does it bear on Virgil's treatment of motherhood. The scene of Venus' appearance (608-616) is filled with verbal echoes of the sow's sacrifice. In both scenes, the biological significance of

parenthood is overshadowed by a metaphorical fatherhood that nurtures the state rather than the individual. This preference is further evidenced, for example, in the civic imagery on Aeneas' shield as well as the creation of the shield itself, as Vulcan's creativity—sparked by seduction—turns out to be a form of metaphorical fatherhood that replaces his biological son, Cacus. Mothers experience a similar loss of significance for their biological role, but there exists no metaphorical function—no *mater patriae*—to fill the gap. Thus, unlike fathers, mothers are essentially alienated from Aeneas' new civic order (as suggested by Wiltshire 1989, Newman and Newman 2005). They act as a subversive, external force, questioning the necessity of the sacrifices made.

In conclusion, reflecting on the intersection of Virgil's depictions of parenthood with Augustan culture and history, it seems that the poet offers neither wholesale approval nor unmitigated condemnation of the elevation of "state" fatherhood that he depicts. Rather, in the Virgilian view of the world, the undeniable gains that come with the founding of a civilization are always accompanied by losses, and the significance of parenthood—the fundamental parenthood of begetting, bearing, and raising a child—is not the least of the things lost. In a father's desperate farewell or a mother's patient silence, Virgil reminds us of the terrible cost of becoming *pater patriae*.

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